

film news

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DOCUMENTARY *film news*

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The cover still is from Rossellini's *Paisa*

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True, the contents are rather obscure boys,
But don't let that worry your head.
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When the world and his wife were abed.
Now it's hot and ready to serve boys
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All thanks to a committee or two boys
Planning away in a room;
We now have a solid foundation boys
For the start of a wonderful boom.

So here's to the best of both worlds boys,
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We've nothing to lose but ourselves boys,
For we've not had much time to think.

For the pie is as high as the skies boys
And there's room for us all inside.
And so long as you don't lift the lid boys
You won't know who's taking the ride.

To found a committee is one thing boys
To commit a foundation's worse,
So don't get rash ideas in your heads boys
About stinging the public purse.

And to think it has all been prepared boys,
In the name of the kids at school.
Won't it give you a great big thrill boys,
To make a new teaching tool?

But you've got to remember its name boys,
Take care not to call it a spade,
It's God's gift to this generation boys,
The wonderful visual aid.

The Sociological Implications of the Film in Colonial Areas

by

DR K. L. LITTLE

I SHALL limit myself to an examination of the general sociological implications of film as applied to colonial audiences, relating my points particularly to the areas of West Africa with which I am most familiar, namely the Protectorate of Sierra Leone and the Gambia. What is the relation of film content to society? We always assume that the film has an influence on society, upon customs and upon morals. My impression is that, scientifically, we know very little about this matter. Such scientific work on the sociological influence of film as has been carried out has not borne very impressive results. Cinema is merely one of the many cultural media operating in society. Possibly film content tends to recapitulate social trends and tastes rather than to initiate them or to set them in motion. It may, of course, be true that film helps to form some minor habits.

Film works with established stereotypes, with ideas which are current. It uses stereotypes which are already familiar and helps to imprint them more strongly on the popular mind. Film strengthens existing social attitudes (*cf* the work of American sociologists). It is important, however, to realize that the film and the cinema possess institutional significance as part of the general life of society. Cinema in Europe and America has reached a stage of development, which also contains a strong element of 'cultism', as exemplified in the adoration of popular 'stars'. This is not yet so in Africa and other tropical territories.

In colonial areas, I think it is necessary to conceive of film on two distinct but interrelated planes—i.e. that of entertainment and that of education. The function of film in either case is to make African or other indigenous peoples socially conscious of themselves in a changing world. African society is now changing with extraordinary rapidity, and in consequence there are many individuals in a 'marginal' position between the African and the Western world. They have a foot in either society and an uncertain insecure position in both. There is a constant pull between the two, a constant conflict, entailing for the individual great difficulty of personal adjustment. Here is one important function of the film. It should be a means of assisting people to adjust themselves to their changing environment and society. But to accomplish this, the film must present material and lines of action in a meaningful context. It will be most effective if it is designed in terms of the characteristics of the indigenous culture. For example, the film

could be used as a story-telling medium, a type of medium which is familiar to African culture, and one which traditionally is one of the main forms of instruction and entertainment. Application of this story-telling method will help to attain successful results, particularly if the narrative technique used starts from a background of familiar events and happenings. Such a technique will enable new ideas to be introduced into a context which is already known and understood. To make films for Africa it is vital, as far as possible, to think in terms of African culture, to understand and, if possible, to use African symbolism. To my mind the basic need for the effective production of films for Africa is that film-makers undergo a thorough anthropological training and should study deeply the African culture, particularly from the angle of linguistics and formal symbolism. Failing that ideal preparation for film-making for Africa, might I suggest a number of themes, a number of lines of action which are likely to be effective, to attract the African, and which could be exploited in the production of films.

The first is litigation and court procedure. This should provide the kind of dramatic situation which would be generally understood and immediately significant to any African audience.

Secondly, films dealing with traditional scenes and events are likely to be successful. In every African community the sense of history, of tradition, is very strong. Particularly among the illiterate people there is a very intense sense of continuity with the past, which largely takes the form of stories about the deeds of predecessors and forebears—stories which are absolutely lifelike and vivid to the audience.

Films with simple themes, the jealous wife, the thief, bargaining at market, etc., would be equally meaningful. One must remember that one is dealing with folk forms which are indigenous as well as innately dramatic. A parallel may be found in the Irish plays of Lady Gregory. This applies to the rural areas; in the 'urbanized' districts, films of a more sophisticated type will be necessary.

Another form which might well be used is that of the return of the ex-Servicemen, which could be used for description of life abroad. It is not uncommon in Africa to see ex-Servicemen in a market-place or on the verandah or a friend's house, recounting tales of their adventures and describing the sights they have seen overseas.

With regard to the more specifically educational film, some suggestions are as follows:

Films could usefully be made showing the wide ramifications of the native production of cash crops, like cocoa, as part of world economy. This could be made in the form of a narrative of the whole process of production, exchange in trade, followed by the processing and preparation of the manufactured product, its distribution, and consumption in a European home. This could equally be done for manufactured goods for which native products are exchanged, as with cloth, cotton goods, etc. Such a type of film might help in introducing a sense of belonging to a world community and in breaking down the state of affairs in which many people barely move beyond the village horizon, both geographically and psychologically.

With regard to technique in film-making for rural Africa: a non-sophisticated technique is necessary. Any symbolism that is employed must be indigenous to the culture of the people concerned.

To sum up briefly some of the important points on the subject of film-making. For success, the cinema should fill the place of an institution—like that of the story-teller—with which the people are familiar. A narrative sequence should give the best results. Production should be in the vernacular for specific purposes, and the participation on all levels of African personnel is desirable, particularly if they have a knowledge of and pride in their own culture. The use of the folk idiom is necessary, whenever possible. Incidentally, film-makers should remember that music can be very important, especially drumming, in respect of its symbolical as well as entertainment value, while satirical themes acted by Africans are likely to be successful.

(Dr K. L. Little is a lecturer in social anthropology at the London School of Economics. This address was given to a meeting of the International Committee of the Scientific Film Association on September 20, 1948. The Scientific Film Association, in co-operation with British Documentary, has established a permanent committee for the study of the Film in Mass Education and Colonial Development, and for the collection and distribution of information on the subject.)

Rossellini and Us: *Paisa*

by

PETER BRINSON

'NO MAN,' wrote Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality*, 'can look directly at himself, but art makes of the Universe a mirror in which we catch glimpses of ourselves, not as we are, but as we are in active potentiality of becoming in relation to reality through society. . . . The more we grip external reality, the more our art develops and grows increasingly subtle. . . . Art tells us what science cannot tell us, and what religion only feigns to tell us—what we are and why we are, why we hope and suffer and love and die. It does not tell us this in the language of science, as theology and dogma attempt to do, but in the only language that can express these truths, the language of inner reality itself, the language of affect and emotion.'

It is our criticism of Rossellini that in *Paisa*, whilst taking hold of 'external reality' he yet does not tell clearly enough in the 'language of inner reality itself' the story which he has to unfold; he does not truthfully enough express the underlying significance of the events with which he deals and the relationship of his characters to those events. *Paisa* is the work of a master; it is not, what some of the critics would have us believe, the work of a genius.

We acknowledge the grandeur of its composition and the sympathy which touches every character, a sympathy in step with the time. These were the days of Liberation and the defeat of fascism, when America still meant for the peoples of the world the progressive policies of Roosevelt. There moved then 'A spirit abroad in Europe which is finer and braver than anything that tired continent has known for centuries, and which cannot be withstood.' The future of Italy, and of Europe too, rested then and remains with the little thief, with Carmela below the cliff, with Cigolani whom the Nazis hanged and with his friends whom they murdered. *Paisa* is a noble monument to them. Yet the inscription thereon lacks the note of hope, of faith in the future, which is here the inner reality of the story. The dominant theme is of horror and destruction. The great truth of the triumph of the poor, the masses themselves, over Nazism and all that it means, this is concealed. We suspect that in treating his subject thus, Rossellini has allowed himself to overlook a famous dictum of Engels which no artist should forget: 'the more the author's views are concealed the better for the work of art'. We suspect this now all the more when the note of gloom has deepened, reaching its apotheosis in *Germany Year Zero*.

But in assessing the works of Rossellini available in this country, and in comparing these works with productions over here, it is important to bear in mind both the dates when the films were made and the character of the events with which they deal. To bear in mind these dates is to draw the conclusion that a comparison between Rossellini's work and British documentary production only becomes significant if British war productions are included. Nothing produced in this country since the war can compare either with our own war productions or with *Open City* and *Paisa*, and to what extent Rossellini is succeeding with more contemporary themes where British producers are failing can alone be judged when his latest picture is completed.

However, the appearance of *Paisa* at this juncture does underline both the advantages which Italian documentary producers enjoy over producers in this country, in spite of the incomparably greater pressure of the dollar against Italian economic independence, and the stagnation of British documentary itself. It may be, as one reviewer believes, that force of circumstances in part accounts for the 'new realism' of the Italian cinema. 'They have had to improvise and use their ingenuity as never before,' wrote Miss Cullen, 'in order to overcome the lack of studio space, new photographic equipment and a shortage of electricity for their arc lamps. They have taken their cameras out into the streets of the cities, and into the fields of the countryside; they have used non-professional actors and actresses, and situations for their scripts that they have experienced themselves.' But we need to remember also that Italian legislation gives documentary film production an encouragement and a protection still lacking over here. Not only does the law of April 8, 1948, recognize that the protection and development of Italian cinematography is the task of the Government, it lays down important regulations with regard to Italian production, which can be summarized as follows:

(a) The producer of an Italian film of over 2,000 metres length, the first performance of which takes place before December 31, 1949, shall receive a grant of 10 per cent of the gross receipts for a period of four years from the date of its first performance.

(b) A further grant of 6 per cent on the above-mentioned takings and for the same period will be made, by way of premium, to films which the Technical Commission of the

Film Division recognizes as being of cultural and artistic value.

(c) In the case of Italian documentary films a grant of 3 per cent of the gross receipts is made within the same time limits, but only to films which have been recognized as meritorious by the Technical Commission.

(d) Producers of Italian newsreels of over 150 metres length shall receive a grant equivalent to 2 per cent of the gross receipts from performances at which those films are shown for a period of six months from the first public performance.

(e) A fund, equivalent to 1 per cent of the gross receipts of Italian films has been established for the purpose of financing the artistic and cultural development of the Italian film and the exchange of films with foreign countries.

(f) The quota for the obligatory showing of national films is 80 days per year.

(g) The programme of each performance must include the showing of at least one short film (documentary or newsreel) of national production.

(h) The State Treasury's contribution to the National Labour Bank's autonomous Section for Film Credits is authorized to give credits up to 60 per cent of production costs.

The differences between Italian and British legislation do not, of course, alone account for the present state of British documentary. *Paisa*'s appearance in this country, together with the praises lavished upon it by nearly every critic serve to throw into relief the absence here in recent works of any comparable inspiration and technical virtuosity. The warmth of this welcome is well merited by Rossellini's mastery of his medium, but its almost totally unqualified nature, in spite of the fact that the film falls short in some degree from what would have been the most sincere and, in the artistic sense, the most truthful interpretation of the subject, is the measure not only of the absence of comparable recent works of our own but of the urgent need to consider the whole orientation of British documentary today, the direction of its movement, its role and obligations, of the need, in short, for documentary as an art to reconsider its approach to external reality and to speak in clearer terms 'the language of inner reality itself, the language of affect and emotion'.

Report of the Commission on Technical Needs, Press, Radio and Film, p. 237. UNESCO, Paris 1948.

One Dog—Two Trees

WHO SAYS EXPERIMENTAL FILM?

by Jørgen Roos

Documentary today is as big as a house . . .

JOHN GRIERSON

Well, indeed there is something wrong with documentary films. We have heard it from the audience, we can see it in the films, and it appears from the current discussion among film-men.

Just as there was reason to laud the production basis created for the fighting documentary film by Grierson, Cavalcanti and other pioneers—there may be reason today to stop for just a moment and ask: 'Well, why then have we built this house?'

1. Is it to be the place where the vanguard of the world's film creators is striving to achieve new possibilities of expression, and sharpen and develop their artistic weapons for creations of unknown dimensions?

Or

2. Are we to get together a staff of helpful men giving their social services to a robot organization, watching their energy and youth being wasted on the platform, which was erected by Grierson, and which fits into the plans for all existing authorities in all countries, irrespective of political opinion?

We recognize in point 2 the way things are today.

But we want point 1 instead.

When Len Lye came to his boss in the GPO and said, 'I want to make a film without a camera,' Cavalcanti answered: 'Well, we haven't very much to lose—go ahead.' We all know the scope of this conversation and must admit that this was an attitude from a producer, which we need today. If documentary film in its future life will yield a couple of rooms in its house to experimenting film art, maybe even support it by virtue of its position of production—then there is every reason to believe that documentary film will not go on being a term of abuse.

In Denmark documentary film has absorbed all the film-men who are not working in the commercial production. As documentary film is mainly financed by the State, this means that in our production we have no free film creators. Only the artists and engineers who are able to subordinate their intentions to a propagandistic or educational tendency can be certain of a continued production.

But a few privately produced films have proved that there is a wish to make film an individual branch of art. It is all in an embryo state, and it is impossible to refer to a development beset with tradition. As a matter of

About a year ago *Dansk Filmforbund* (Danish Film Association—the Danish documentary film organization) started a spirited, critical and informative paper—*DF Bulletin*. The tenth number of Volume 2 was an international issue, and printed in English. It was reviewed in our last issue. It contained an article by a well-known Danish documentary worker, Jørgen Roos, headed *Who says Experimental Film?* Arthur Elton wrote a reply, translated into Danish, under the title *Hus Forbi* (Barking Up the Wrong Tree), and published in the November issue of *DF Bulletin*—by whose courtesy the two articles are here reprinted. Almost all the Danish films mentioned are listed and synopsized in *Documentary in Denmark*—the English edition of the Danish Government film catalogue.

fact, it is still a question about few films only, but considering the interest, which especially the young film-men but also the finance authorities have shown towards these small works—then there is hope for a development in the desired direction.

In the first experimental film *The Escape** Albert Mertz and I tried to free ourselves of a stagnated documentary style and find freer forms of expression. In the subsequent *The Heart Thief*, which was financed by a group of abstract painters, we went still farther and told a completely improbable story in a naturalistic milieu. Richard Winther, a young painter, last year produced his first film *Triple Boogie* which was the first abstract film in this country. This year, Søren Melson, a well-known director of documentary films, has produced *The Tear* painted direct on the film strip. Our latest production is *Opus 1* which I have scratched direct into the black film, picture by picture, and which is accompanied by a New Orleans march.

I shall leave the judgment of these films in the hands of a more competent and qualified jury, but I think I have the approval of my friends in stating that these small experimental films have been a greater satisfaction to us than a long series of documentary films. We are working in the production of documentary films and want to support it to as wide an extent as possible, as we think that it will be possible to find a production basis which will support the experiments to a higher degree than is the case at present.

* *Documentary in Denmark*, No. 19, 1942.

This is a cogent necessity, not only for the notion of documentary film, but for film art as a whole. The documentalists often use their acquired abilities as a spring-board into commercial production. The reason for this must also be sought in the much too uniform arrangement and the resulting limited possibilities of personal formulation.

Let us have a reform in the production conditions, give the film artists the freedom which is necessary, and which will make the house that is built for film as a means of education a centre for film as an art.

It is the film-men who want this.

Who says experimental films?

We do!

BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

by Arthur Elton

By making the tenth issue of the *Dansk Filmforbund Bulletin* international, with authoritative articles on Danish documentary and film legislation, the Danish film movement has made yet another contribution to international understanding. I hope the paper will be ready everywhere. I am sure it will be admired—and envied. Papers owned and produced independently by documentary are still all too rare. Since the international number of the Bulletin has given some space to the battle between the old aesthetic and the new, I hope I may be allowed to loose off some shells at my friend, Jørgen Roos, and to reserve a salvo or so for his brother, Karl.¹

Firstly, let me tell what the battle is about. On one side is the sanctity-of-personal-expression school, bumbling, bombazined and sometimes more than a little bad tempered, with its feet in the mud and its back to the future. From his article *Who says 'Experimental Film'?* I think Jørgen Roos must be a Captain or even a Colonel of this school, with Karl Roos as a Sergeant Major. On the other side is the realist or documentary school, drawing its strength and inspiration from the patterns of everyday life. Among its leaders are Skot-Hansen and half a score of Danish film artists.

The Roos school sighs and says, if only society or the government or Dansk Kulturfilm would give us money and equipment and time, without either directive or control, we would turn out some real film art which would make everyone sit up and hold their hats on. Only give us freedom (which is their way of saying cash), they cry, and we will spin films out of our souls or stomachs or what-have-you's which will show everyone What's What. Jørgen dislikes official sponsorship because

he says it kills art and means that one is serving 'a robot organization'. Karl seems equally upset that two Danish documentary directors, including Bjarne Henning-Jensen² have decided to make commercial features, in spite of the fact that many of us find their commercial work powerful, striking and sincere. If the Roos school has its way and compels the film artists to deprive themselves of both official and commercial sponsorship, all that may be left for them to do is what a malicious critic said Swinburne did—that is, to sit in their own excrement and add to it. What the Roos school wants, in common with American big business and reactionaries all over the world, is freedom to use resources without control, privilege without responsibility, and suckers for sponsors.

The films of the documentary school, from *Night Mail* to *A Matter of your Freedom*, have their origins in the realities of the outside world. Their raw material is life. They gain both their motive power and their drama from the reciprocal pressures always to be found between people and their social, political and governmental organizations. It is therefore not only right, but inevitable that documentary looks to government for its finances, and has a very deep interest in seeing that its films meet the wants of the public whose needs have called them into existence.

The documentary school finds beauty in an appeal to the mind no less than to the senses. The very clarity of good exposition is a pleasurable quality in itself. For this reason, documentary has developed an aesthetic to contain at once *Hydraulics* and *Listen to Britain*, *Chants Populaires* and *We are the Railways*. The range of documentary is as wide as literature itself. Within it, you will find the simple teaching film, the advanced scientific film report and the lyrical film poem. It is worth remembering that what Theodor Christensen calls the 'all-dominating British information film' embraces *Lord Siva Danced*, *Steps of the Ballet*, *Waverley Steps*, *Three Dawns to Sydney* and *Four Voices of Malay*—to mention only five notable British films released since last Christmas.

The Roos school wants to make the film 'an individual branch of art'. For them, film experiment is a method of finding a 'freer form of expression'. They seem more concerned with how to express themselves than with that they say. On one of the rare occasions when a government seems to have given a completely free hand to private inspiration, the result was *Pan and the Girl*³ a film which has taken a deal of living down, and one which is greatly inferior to the same director's *The Corn is in Danger*⁴ which has its roots firmly in agricultural propaganda. For the documentary school, almost every film, from *Colour Box* to *The Corn is in Danger*, and from *The Film of Denmark*⁵ to *The Feeling of Hostility*, is an experiment.

For each subject presents new problems in shaping and expressing material so that it may be comprehended, not only intellectually, but also with all the feeling that a work of art can evoke.

If the documentary school can call up a whole host of notable and experimental films in its support, the Roos school is oddly shy of naming films. They prefer to find their support in personal witnesses rather than film titles. Having excommunicated Grierson as a deviator, or even a destroyer of true film art, they rely on Cavalcanti, Winifred Holmes, Len Lye, Irmgard Schemke and 'the bulk of cinema-goers'. I do not know the views of Irmgard Schemke. I do know that the Roos school have no idea at all what the bulk of cinema-goers think, feel or say. They must have introduced the cinema-goers as a bluff in the hopes that no one would call it. I do know the work of Cavalcanti, Winifred Holmes and Len Lye.

Cavalcanti made his living in France by making commercial features, and his name by making *Rien que les Heures* and the charming, sensitive, gay but unimportant *En Rade*. Grierson hired him in the middle thirties to help with the GPO film unit. His technical virtuosity is great, and everyone profited and is grateful for his skill as a craftsman, critic and teacher. Almost his only personal expedition into film making at this time, the comedy *Pett and Pott*, was a failure. He then worked in a general way on many films, and his contributions to the sound tracks of *Night Mail* and *Coal Face* were notable. He stayed on with the GPO film unit after Grierson had left, and was the producer of a number of excellent films, including two of the first wartime documentaries, *The First Days* and *Men of the Lightship*. Towards the end of his time with the government film unit he seemed to become disgruntled. In 1940, he left documentary for what I suppose he hoped would be the greater and more invigorating freedoms of the studios. Since then, most of his commercial films, if sensitive and tasteful, have been commonplace. Cavalcanti's most significant contributions to the art of the film have undoubtedly been made within the framework of British government sponsorship. At his best, he was a solver of problems in bringing alive the public services on the screen.

Though I do not wish to pooh-pooh Winifred Holmes as a film critic, I am prepared for the Roos school to have her.

Finally, Len Lye, Jørgen Roos is really cheating by introducing him at all. Lye is a New Zealander—a schoolmaster and an artist. He came to London in the early thirties with Jack Ellit, a New Zealand musician and expert on jazz. Together they made *Tusilava*, an abstract film which few people saw, and fewer remember. Except for a puppet film which has never finished, *Tusilava* was Len Lye's only expedition into self-expression for its own sake. *Tusilava*

had no point because it had no purpose. However, it is probable that Lye's later and more creative film work had its origin here. *Tusilava* must have been the first film ever to be made by drawing directly on the celluloid.

It was not till Len Lye had an opportunity to use his great talents for public information that he made films of real experimental or artistic value. *Colour Box* and *Rainbow Dance* were both propaganda films for the GPO Savings Bank, and *Trade Tattoo* for inter-dominion trade. Should Jørgen Roos argue that these films prove his case, because their content is divorced from the aims of their sponsors, he must think again. All three get their inspiration directly from their subject matter. The Jørgen Roos fantasy of how *Colour Box* came to be made must be sketched, too. He says: 'When Lye came to his boss in the GPO and said: "I want to make a film without a camera", Cavalcanti answered: "Well, we haven't very much to lose—go ahead."' First of all, Grierson was Len Lye's boss, and not Cavalcanti. Secondly it was only by an effort that Grierson was able to mould both the inflexibilities of the Savings Bank, and Len Lye's artistic aspirations, so that each side could contribute to the joint affair which culminated in *Colour Box*.

Len Lye's early films came straight out of the public service. If you would follow his influence and see where it has taken root, you will have to go to Ottawa, where it is flourishing under the benevolent but also careful sponsorship of the National Film Board of Canada. The splendid and imaginative works of Norman Mac-Caren and his colleagues are at once major contributions to the art of the cinema, and ten thousand miles away from the preciousities of the Roos school. When the film history of the last twenty-five years comes to be written, I am afraid that Jørgen Roos's *The Escape* is likely to be dismissed as pastiche. The historian will surely look for the aesthetic, creative and dramatic roots of Danish documentary in such works as *The Film of Denmark*, *Motherhelp Sugar*, *People in a House*, *The Corn is in Danger*, *A Matter of Your Freedom*, *Cutter H.71*, *Potatoes*, *Generator Gas*, *Pay Your Taxes Gladly* and *The Toad*⁶.

¹ Karl Roos. Poet and documentary script-writer. Wrote the poetic commentary for *A Matter of Your Freedom* (1946), the record of the Danish underground movement. Reviewed by Winifred Holmes in *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 15, No. 60, 1948. In another article he regrets that two able Danish documentary directors 'now direct practically only commercine films'.

² Director of *Ditte—Child of the People*, and *Those Dratted Kids*, both seen privately in London and Edinburgh.

³ *Documentary in Denmark*, No. 61, 1945.

⁴ *Documentary in Denmark*, No. 59, 1944.

⁵ *Documentary in Denmark*, No. 1, 1935.

⁶ Respectively *Documentary in Denmark*, Nos. 1; 25; 28; 40; 59; —; 47; 52; 56; 68; 62.

Ten Minutes That Shook Me Rigid

by

JOHN TRUMPER

'This is regarded by the highest authorities as revolutionary screen treatment ranking with the introduction of the close-up, the camera boom and sound.' Thus the publicity blurb. An alternative, I gather, presumably intended for an illiterate arc of the Critics' Circle, was simply a length of cord; a gag, after all, far more compatible and in scale with the advertised article than the pompous nonsense quoted above. For the story that *Rope* tells and the idiom of its telling are inseparable, the one as freakish as the other, and furthermore the difference between its idiom and that of any other story-telling film is one merely of degree, not of kind.

'Thou shalt not kill.' The fact that the censor felt himself constrained to make this platitudinous statement of faith before the main title, and also to excise the original opening in which murder most foul is committed before our very eyes, illustrates both the strength and the weakness of the original story. Its strength, of course, lies in its strict unity both of time and of place, a unity that is both a technical *tour de force* and also a very tangible element in the creation of convincing naturalism and suspense. But against this strength we must set an almost equivalent weakness, that of abnormal and occasionally unreal characterization. Can we really care less whether these two effete young homosexuals, priggish and neurotic as they are respectively made to appear, meet their merited doom in Reel 2 or in Reel 20? Despite the unusual urgency given to the story by its two unities, we can only watch the development of situation—plot would be too strong a word—and the clash of character with the same kind of cold and detached excitement with which we would follow an expert game of chess.

In his film treatment, Hitchcock has done all in his power to retain the strength of the original story, but its weakness has been increased rather than lessened by the softening of eccentricities of character, eccentricities without which the interplay of action and reaction seems to have no convincing starting-point. The weakness has merely been shifted from freakish characterization to arbitrary and imposed behaviour.

As the strength of the story, its unity of time and place, is retained by a deliberate abhorrence of visual interruption and consequently by rejection of the infinitely variable rhythms and scan-

uniform flow of visual prose, far more responsibility than usual rests with the actors, especially as their actions must still remain convincing within a framework of character whose corners have been carefully rounded by the scriptwriter. And it is here that *Rope*, as a film, succeeds brilliantly. The cast, with one exception, bless her, give us acting whose subtleties of emphasis and timing are precious little in evidence on the London stage and whose qualities of speed and urgency must be held up as an example to those who managed to make *The Small Voice*, despite its advantage of a more normal editing scheme, the monotonous charade it was. If I had to single out a name to praise above the others, it would be Farley Granger's pathetic study of neurotic and conscience-stricken misery: his tardy and ineffective rebellion against the hypnotic arrogance of his partner is one of the few really moving things in the film.

Without the infinitely variable rhythms of editing, too, the visual tempo relies largely upon camera-movement. Apart from the same kind of premonitory wobble that made us exclaim during *Hamlet*, 'Here comes a crane shot,' these movements are well-selected and succeed in assembling an astonishing variety of significant set-ups within the limits of each reel. It's worthy of mention, though, that the most effective moment in the film finds the camera, for once, motionless while we wait in mounting suspense for Mrs Wilson to open the chest. The changing colours of the New York background give the story, with the nominal assistance of Natalie Kalmus, a perspective which *Lifeboat* totally missed and, towards the end, a melodramatic accompaniment which made music unnecessary. This background only betrayed its artificiality when we tracked towards or away from the window and the supposedly distant skyscrapers became larger or smaller with the objects in the room.

Don't imagine from all this that there was a mere routine job for the editor. Apart from his work on the original script, the sound track was his to make or mar. The brilliance of the sound at the end of the story is obvious enough, but less obvious is the handling of off-screen dialogue and the dramatic use of silence. One small piece of sound will illustrate its integral part in the film: the police-siren which is heard distantly when Rupert is first questioning Phillip and which foreshadows the banshee wail that draws its hideous curtain over the final climax. Some-

thing, I feel, more sinister and morbid could have been chosen as the often repeated piano piece than that jolly little Poulenc *Mouvement Perpetuel*.

There remains, in this survey of the film's resources, the purely physical problem of reel-changes, and it must be stated in all fairness that this problem remains unsolved. Three times we are asked to admire, intensely but irrelevantly, the midnight-blue of someone's back and the little green dot that hops on to it and off again just below the right shoulder. There are, besides, four very ordinary cuts, from observer to observed, from speech to reaction, from off-screen speech to speaker and from question to answer. The final reel-change, where Rupert, in opening the chest and discovering the body, blacks out the screen, would have been dramatic indeed but for the fact that the darkness reminded us irresistibly of our previous back-scratching explorations.

This unsolved problem of reel-changes suggests that the ideal medium for a story like *Rope* is television, where a mobile camera can grind away to its heart's content and where the normal film practice of rhythmic visual interruption and punctuation is impossible in any case. The problems of adequate rehearsal, however, are probably insurmountable. We can only wait and see.

It's sheer madness to insist, as many well-meaning critics have done, that the film represents a serious menace to the future of creative editing. The story it tells has been handled in the only compatible way, but because its idiom would be not only unsuited to, but unneeded by, any story without the same two strict unities, that alone is enough to show how freakish and inimitable *Rope* must remain. It's new and unusual, yes: but then, so is a well-respected film-technician's concerto for sackbut, virginals and three lavatory-chairs. We go on writing music. But even if *Rope* had been less than the small-scale imperfectly-realized *tour de force* that it is, we must admit that Hitchcock's instinctive enthusiasm for experiment and his delight in his craft are such that we can forgive him even his total failures. No doubt his genius for shock tactics, for the sudden image and the unexpected word, will soon reassert itself after this brief period of strenuous self-denial.

The Peaceful Years

Reviewed by JOHN MADDISON

The Peaceful Years. Pathé Documentary Unit. Producer: Peter Baylis. Commentator: Emlyn Williams. Drawings: Joy Thomas. Music: Hal Evans.

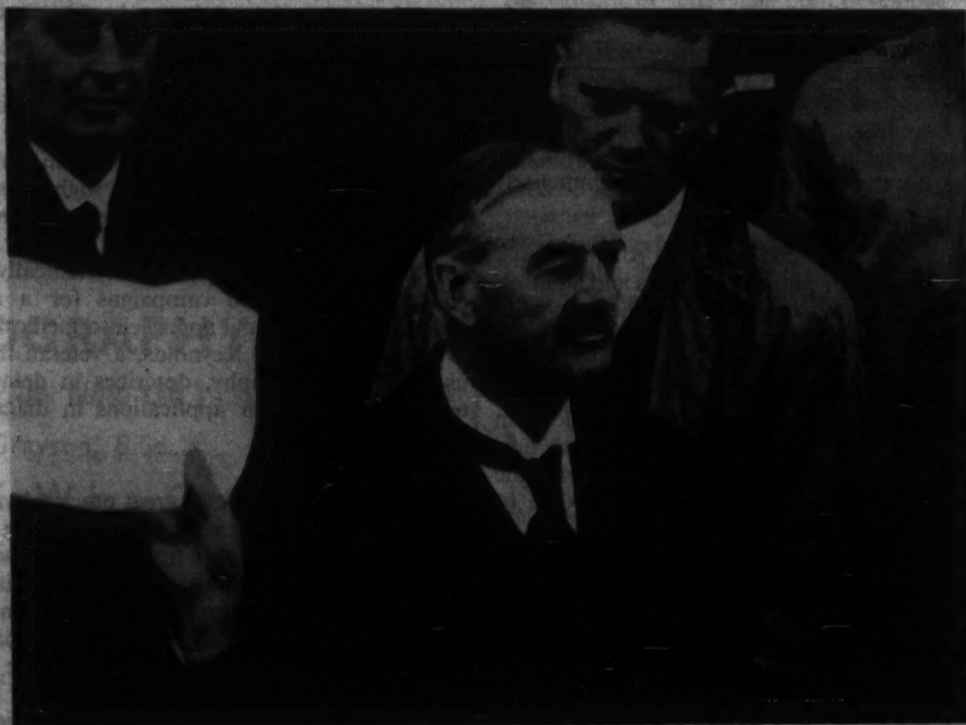
Few people would take a contemporary history book out of a local library to read for pleasure, but *The Peaceful Years*, which is, after all, history with the skin rubbed off, will draw people to the cinema on its own account. Here is a new experience for most of us: a chance to see something of the pattern of history, the pitiful repetitions in man's behaviour and affairs, and so to gain a perspective about events usually too difficult to attain when we are living in the middle of them.

Peter Baylis and his team have carved from newsreels of the period and other sources visual records of some of the main events of those fateful twenty years, 1919-39. They have tried to give a balanced review covering activities in every field where the film camera has penetrated—and it has managed to get into some murky corners. That they have succeeded in making a film which will be vitally interesting to students of social behaviour as well as to the poor sap whose behaviour is being studied is no little compliment to their disarming selection of material. The subjects range from battles to bathing belles, from the songs of 'Hutch' to the voice of Roosevelt.

It is admittedly a journalist's history, made up of the kind of matter that would anyway have got on to the front page, but that is no flaw in a film which succeeds in being both a thunderingly good piece of entertainment and a stark object lesson. For here in just over an hour's run is all the folly of man's conduct of affairs over those twenty vital years.

This film follows the earlier review of one year, *Scrapbook for 1922*, made as a venture by Pathé. That film was very well worth-while because of the historical comparison it afforded with the post-war situation of 1947, twenty-five years later. The sobering effect of seeing the kind of things happening then on a far larger scale than they are occurring today could not but help to make people see the present-day difficulties in a better perspective—and any film which can do that at the same time as making people laugh is the most valuable addition to a cinema programme. In *The Peaceful Years* there is not this easily discerned parallel, because they cover the whole of the inter-Great Wars period; consequently there is nothing so clear-cut. But this film is going to make people look a little more deeply into their daily news and wonder if we

haven't already started another twenty years' march to some other bigger catastrophe. To set people thinking is unusual enough for a film in an ordinary cinema programme: to do so without grinding an axe, and with real humour and wit is an even rarer achievement.



The technique of presenting the visual material has been developed since the earlier film. Emlyn Williams gives a pleasant and unaffected introduction to it, as well as speaking the linking commentary. But the body of comment is carried by character voices which display some special interest or point of view that often gives an intriguing twist to the subject matter. An hour glass, with its sands on the run, and drawings are used (with perhaps a little too unflinching a regularity) as devices to link the main sequences. The use of symbolic drawings is an interesting attempt to get over the appalling difficulty, common to all films conveying ideas, of finding something to put on the screen while the com-

mentary sums up or makes a general statement. Although the later drawings are the least successful, the first one, and the use made of it, certainly adds something to the film: it convinces that there is an idea of presentation here which is worth pursuing even if in this case it has not

reached its best realization. Music, too, has been used intelligently and humorously, often giving point or poignancy to the event on the screen.

There is no doubt that *The Peaceful Years* will have a very wide distribution on its own merits. If anyone wishes to learn the reason for such a desirable prospect for a film, it is to be found in the film's entertainment value. The presentation is lively, simple and, above all, human. Even more important, there is no feeling in the film that its makers were so overburned with an important message to be 'got over' that they couldn't stoop to pick up a bit of fun by the wayside.

Book Reviews

Ten Minutes That Should Be Read
A Pioneer Document**Science in Film**Edited by **BLODWEN LLOYD**Reviewed by **JOHN MADDISON**

AMONG ACADEMIC scientists, it is rare to find one who has really come to grips with the problems of film in teaching and research. Dr Lloyd, editor of this 'world review and reference book', illustrated with stills, is such a rarity. Her knowledge of the making, distribution and use of scientific films is broad and sympathetic. Happily, too, she has chosen, in editing this book as her Preface implies, to interpret science in a wide 'impure' sense. Uneasy perhaps lest at this point her more austere colleagues may be looking over her shoulder, she tends rather to apologize for including science for the citizen in her area of operation. Reverence for what is called, I think, in another field, the apparatus of scholarship leads her sometimes to write pompously and to bring in the impressive but ill-defined neologism. Some of the contributors also fall into the flat official manner, which plays such odd tricks with language. But these are minor faults in an immensely stimulating and valuable work.

The book is divided into two roughly equal parts; a series of individual essays and an international scientific film directory. The essays are especially valuable because they bring together under one roof, so to speak, a mass of data, hitherto scattered about in many periodicals and reports. In the chapter, 'The Scientific Film Today', after an uncertain start, the editor herself assembles many interesting facts about the teaching film, particularly in America. One of her observations may be underlined:

By the end of 1943, its (the US Government's) War Department had 10,200 training films and 11,890 training 'shorts'. Many of these are now released for use by educational and other establishments. A similar policy in Britain would no doubt release much valuable material for scientific, industrial and technical training.

Roger Shattuck of UNESCO in his essay 'Scientific Films and the Peoples' surveys the international dissemination of scientific knowledge by films. Cataloguing is an important aspect of this traffic in ideas, and we learn that UNESCO is drawing up a list of films designed to popularize science. (This, Shattuck says, should be ready by the end of 1947—a sidelight on the tedious mechanism of book production these days.) Contemplating present UN discontents at the Palais de Chaillot, one can only sadly agree with him that films, dealing popularly with the scientific outlook and method, are urgently needed. Professor George Bell provides in 'Visual Physiology and the Cine-film', a summary, generally speaking authoritative, of our knowledge of such matters as screen brightnesses, and the best manner of placing screens and arranging

the seats for classroom projection. In a wider context, he recalls Kleitman's experimental finding that looking at films is by no means a physiological relaxation. In a subject remaining seated for two hours or more, there is an increase in muscle tension, shown according to Kleitman, by a statistically significant rise in body temperature of $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 degree Fahrenheit. Bell, incidentally and rightly I think, attacks the conservative aestheticism of Rudolf Arnheim who resents by implication the increasing illusion of reality which technical progress brings in the cinema. In this part of his discussion, there is strangely enough no mention of the work of Michotte of Louvain.

In his review of British films in medicine in the last ten years, Brian Stanford points to the difficulties and the advantages of medical film-making. With medically untrained actors, slight lapses of behaviour are immediately detected by a critical professional audience. (This isn't, one may add, confined to medical films.) Characteristically and endearingly, Stanford campaigns for a more ordered and functional approach to medical film production. Russell Reynolds, a veteran in the use of cineradiography, describes in detail its techniques and their applications in diagnosis and research.

Two other essays are of great practical value. Denys Parsons writes sensibly on scripting and the sources of information upon which the scientific film maker may draw. Quite outstanding is Derek Stewart's 'Technique and Equipment'. This is a tightly packed, carefully marshalled conspectus of recent advances in the use and manufacture of photographic materials, light sources, lenses and camera and projector mechanisms. The book is worth having for this chapter alone.

It is left to the mathematicians to remind us of what is after all the most important single fact about the cinema. In it, we have a new language of symbols. Those who have listened to Robert Fairthorne rapidly throwing out the darting stimuli of new conceptions will not be surprised that his, though the briefest, is the most original and thought-provoking chapter in the book. Stressing the visual quality of many everyday symbols, Fairthorne remarks quizzically 'Even the arbitrary symbols "?" and "!" look really puzzled and surprised'. At the recent SFA meeting at the Royal Institution, I was struck again by the entrancing visual quality of his and Salt's pre-war films on the differential calculus. In 'Film and Mathematics', I. R. Vesselo analyses these and practically all other available mathe-

matical films. This is a lucid and restrained piece of writing, enjoyable to read.

Customs formalities and the high cost of film merchandise are no doubt great obstacles to the inter-change of scientific films between peoples. But one of the greatest problems is perhaps that there is no easy way of finding out what films are available and where they can be got. The reference section of this book comes partly to the rescue. For it, Dr Lloyd has taken the whole world as her parish. Over a hundred closely packed pages describe persons and institutions producing and distributing films, give addresses and shrewdly provide answers to exactly the sort of questions likely to be asked. Inevitably there are gaps and false emphases; but fewer than might have been expected. There are, too, some irritating signs of hasty proof-reading. The book is nevertheless a *tour de force*.

Dr Lloyd undoubtedly took her courage in both hands in assuming the role of the first encyclopaedist of scientific cinema. The risk was worth taking. It was good to see Dr Lloyd as a delegate to the recent international scientific film congress making new contacts, and finding, it may be hoped, new collaborators. In this work, she deserves the co-operation of scientists and film-makers everywhere.

Science in Film. Published by Samson Low. 15s.

INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL AIDS

On December 17, the *National Committee for Visual Aids in Education* and the newly formed *Educational Foundation for Visual Aids*—now jointly responsible for promoting the use of the medium in schools—took their bow before the public at the Royal Empire Society. A programme of speeches and films was presented to a large audience representing the educational world, the film industry, and other interested sections. The speakers—Mr Hardman (deputising for the Minister of Education), Alderman Wright Robinson (vice-Chairman of the National Committee), Sir Roland Wall and Dr Harrison (of the Educational Foundation) under the Chairmanship of Mr H. H. Williams (Chairman of the National Committee)—spoke of the great prospects for visual aids in education now that the new machinery had been established.

Six films were then shown to illustrate the start which the National Committee and the Foundation had made. The films were designed for a variety of different age groups and were all sponsored by the Central Office of Information.

Friese-Green

Friese-Green: Ray Allister. (Marstrand Publications, 1948). 12s. 6d.

FRIESE-GREEN fits straight into the English mythology of science. He is the mad inventor immortalized in ephemeral children's magazines of the late nineteenth century. He borrowed something from Captain Nemo and the other Jules Verne scientist who proposed to shoot the ice cap off the North Pole with a gigantic cannon, but accidentally rubbed the noughts off a calculation on his blackboard and missed. He may have lent something to Professor Challenger, for Conan Doyle and Friese-Green may have been neighbours in Brighton. Friese-Green was an individualist, anarchic, unbusiness-like, vague. To these qualities he added genius, enthusiasm and a disregard of the ordinary conventions of living and love. He helped to make other men's

fortunes. He fell dead at the age of 66 at a joint meeting of the KRS and CEA under the chairmanship of Lord Beaverbrook on May 5, 1921, with only the price of a cinema seat in his pocket. The industry which had coined millions, but had allowed the man who had contributed so much to them to die virtually of starvation, erected a monument by Lutyens, which ran:

WILLIAM FRIESE-GREEN,
THE INVENTOR OF KINEMATOGRAPHY,
HIS GENIUS BESTOWED UPON HUMANITY
THE BOON OF COMMERCIAL CINEMATOGRAPHY
OF WHICH HE WAS THE FIRST INVENTOR AND
PATENTEE.

Ray Allister's book studies the evidence for priority of invention of the film camera and projector (as opposed to the moving picture), and proves pretty conclusively that the honour

belongs to Friese-Green. By 1888 he had recorded a series of consecutive photographs of movement on oily paper. By some time in January 1889, he had managed to make sensitized celluloid. He had also designed a camera and a projector. His first successful film was projected to a passing policeman in January 1889. He filed a provisional specification with the Patent Office on June 21, 1889. The completed specification was accepted on May 10, 1890. With the exception of sprockets, which Friese-Green had temporarily abandoned, the principles of his camera were the fundamental ones from which the camera of today has been developed.

In June 1889, Friese-Green wrote to Edison, proposing to associate his camera with Edison's phonograph in order to make talking pictures. The letter was acknowledged by Edison's laboratory, but not by Edison himself. A full description of the camera was requested. Friese-Green sent it. There was no reply, but Edison patented his film camera, the Kinetoscope, in 1891 in America. The patent was not taken out in England, because it could not claim 'novelty' over Friese-Green's earlier patent. In 1910 Edison made an affidavit he had never seen the Friese-Green letters, yet from 1891 to this day Edison has usually been given the sole credit for the invention. Indeed, Friese-Green muddled away the proceeds of his own work, and Edison's drive, combined with the Lumière projector of 1894, laid the foundations of the film industry. It was the Lumière show at the Polytechnic in 1896 which first awoke the imagination of the public.

Though Mr Allister's book is readable and authoritative he has managed to conceal good scholarship under an irritating, diffuse and sometimes slipshod style and presentation. He seems to belong to the school that believes invention to be the isolated and unpredictable product of individual genius. Yet most modern historians agree that inventors are sensitive vehicles, expressing and synthesizing the collective scientific experience of their time. Had the author taken this point of view, his book would have been no less readable, but more profound, and Friese-Green might have appeared as an even greater figure. His motives and character might have been easier to understand. Mr Allister interpolates imaginary conversations, which makes his book seem arch and unreal. He says in his foreword: 'This true story is written in a way that I have sometimes thought intolerable in other biographies. It reports conversations at which the author could not possibly have been present. These conversations appear in this book because, as scenes were described to me by members of Friese-Green's family and by his old colleagues and friends, they set themselves in my mind in dialogue.' Hm.

PHOTOMICROGRAPHY

(A Section of Realist Film Unit Ltd.)

Producer: Dorothy Grayson, B.Sc.

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New Documentary Films

This Is Britain No. 30. Produced by Merlin Film Productions.

Robinson Charley. Produced by Halas and Batchelor.

Man Alive. Produced by Anglo-Scottish Pictures. *Technicians:* Leonard Reeve, Jim Davies, Dick Andrews and Julien Canter.

One Man Story. Produced by the Horizon Film Unit Productions. Directed by Max Munden and Dennis Shand. Photographed by Henry Hall. Music by William Alwyn.

THIS recent batch of COI films can perhaps be regarded as a typical selection of the best of 1948. They exhibit the strengths and weaknesses of British Documentary at the present time. *This Is Britain* is the excellent informative COI magazine. If it has not got quite the verve and pace of Rotha's original *Worker and Warfront*, which it supersedes, it has a solid, sensible approach to present-day happenings which should make it popular all over the world. The Issue No. 30 starts with a description of a new motor-car, passes on to a description of some ingenious methods of handling heavy loads, and ends up with a runround the open-air exhibition of sculpture in Battersea Park. The fact that the film is due to be released in January, while the

exhibition of sculpture was in August, suggests that the COI should step up its tempo. It is absurd to take four months to bring such a simple item to the screen. Moreover, the magazine is released monthly, which makes it even more difficult to understand why the item was not included in the September or October issue. A maddening feature of this particular reel is that the name of the motor-car in the first item is not mentioned. If the motor-car is worth showing, it is worth identifying. Are we still in the dark ages where, if a Government mentions the name of one motor-car, all the other motor-car manufacturers twitter like a cackle of schoolgirls?

Robinson Charley is one of the latest examples of the new colour cartoons made for theatrical release by Halas and Batchelor. If their technique has not broken much ground unfamiliar to Disney, the reels have a verve and a sprightliness of their own and are usually amusing and good-tempered. This one takes us for a trot round contemporary economic theory. Charley explains that if we want to import, we must export. We lost our overseas investments in the war, if we must have wars, what do we expect? To him, evidently, the war was an exciting expedition into knight-errantry, which we took on for the love of it. And now we must pay for our fun. One cannot help feeling that Charley's attitude

is a little strange, and it does not occur to him to explain to us how and why it was that our overseas investments were removed while we were holding the baby for just those people who stripped us.

Man Alive and *One Man Story* are two documentaries running along more or less normal lines. Both of them are made for the Foreign Office. They are finely photographed, smoothly directed and well edited. They meet their points clearly and succinctly. Yet one feels that the writers and directors have not done more than attempt a smooth, workmanlike job. They have not felt the subjects. As a consequence, the very efficiency of the films is a little dull. They run smoothly from end to end, and show little variation in pace, and little sense of dramatic climax. *Man Alive* tries to be humorous, but without much success.

Man Alive deals with safety in factories, and the Safety Inspectors. (Incidentally, surely the directors of *Man Alive* could have found a better joke than to make the Inspector trip over his own carpet?) The world the film shows us is just a little too easy. We are blandly informed that most progressive employers co-operate. Of course they do. But what about the unprogressive ones? The film implies that we have reached a kind of paradise where lions and lambs, employers and workers, managers and Government inspectors, doss down together in one great, glorious bed of luke-warm self-esteem.

One Man's Story is a sketch of the life of Dr McGonigle, the celebrated medical officer of health for Stockton-on-Tees who, second only to Sir John Boyd Orr, aroused the national conscience on such questions as bad housing and malnutrition. He was a social scientist of great importance and a pioneer. He had an uphill struggle against reaction and complacency. Little or none of this goes into the film. Again, we are shown the world of mutual luke-warm self-esteem. It is characteristic of the film that the only housing problem McGonigle runs across is that of a slum landlord, dependent for a living wholly on the rent of two cottages and his old age pension. He cannot afford repairs and our sympathies are with him. This kind of odious distortion of truth is something which the COI had better avoid in future. In fact, most landlords are not living on old age pensions and the rent of two cottages. At that time, for every hard-luck case among landlords, there were a score of thousand hard-luck cases among tenants. Why not select, then, from the majority? If these two films, expertly handled though they be, are representative of what the Foreign Office (for whom both were made) considers suitable propaganda abroad, the sooner these matters are taken out of Foreign Office hands, the better. The presentation of Britain as a country of luke-warm compromises, complacent reformers, bobbish workers and suffering landlords, is one which can do us no good. If the recent Social Films from Denmark could deal with social problems as yet unsolved, surely such a powerful country as Britain can only gain esteem by being equally frank. A. E.

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New Canadian Films

SOME MONTHS ago we reviewed in these pages a selection of new films from the National Film Board of Canada. The result of our critical remarks was a lengthy and explosive letter from the pen of Him Who Must Be Obeyed. For when Big Chief Jollyjack waves his stick there is nothing to be done but dive into the nearest slit trench and scream for mercy.

Now, sadder and wiser men, we again take up the pen, the pen, please God, of fairness, peace and understanding. A new batch of films from the same source has arrived, and rather belatedly we say our little piece.

Stanley Jackson has made a little picture called *Who Will Teach Your Child?* It is not such a little picture, for it runs to four very substantial reels. The first three-quarters or so is a beauty. The idea is to emphasize the importance of the right sort of person taking up teaching as a career, and it is presumably intended for screening not only to trainee teachers and youth organizations, but also to the community in general, for its appeal is certainly directed to those who have children to be taught as well as to those who will do the teaching. Charming studies of children and pleasant, dramatic moments show that a lot of good work has gone into the film, and that Jackson knows what he is talking about. What a pity it is that when the story is apparently over and a pretty fade-out prepares us for the end, a dull elongated anti-climax starts, the significance of which completely escapes us. A contrast is played between the old type of education and the new, but it is scarcely successful and adds nothing to the message of the film. One feels that the boys in Ottawa have the idea that all material must be used somehow and that they haven't yet learned when to stop.

The criticism of over length can easily be applied to many of their productions. *Home Town Paper* is also a likeable work on the publication of a local newspaper in the Okanagan Valley—or anywhere else for that matter. The gathering of domestic news of the type so vital to a country community, the births and deaths, the public meetings and auctions, is illustrated nicely enough, although to British audiences the theme is a trifle over-obvious. Again one gets the impression that discreet trimming could have made such a great improvement. There, of course, we are possibly falling into the mistake we made last time. Maybe, with more years of documentary behind us, we tend falsely to estimate just how much our audiences can cope with. But Canada should learn just a little more of the horrors of being boring.

There is nothing boring about *It's Fun To Sing*. A perfect little gem of a picture about the Leslie Bell Girls' Choir, it has everything. So rarely does documentary attempt a film dealing intelligently with music or any of the skills attached to music, and when attempted so rarely do they succeed, that this reel amply makes up for any of the duller moments. It has good film sense, good film technique, and good honest humour. And that is one of the most precious of all jewels in the documentary movie.

It is a bit of a jump to come to Bob Anderson's *Feeling of Hostility*. It is the psychological film with all the trimmings. The story of a girl's mental problems caused by her unfortunate home life is handled much more smoothly and with much more confidence than the earlier *Feeling of Rejection*. Although the tempo is leisurely it grips as much as all the schizophrenic montrosities from Hollywood put together. Whether the message of the film would satisfy a psychologist depends, we imagine, upon the psychologist. Certainly Canada deserves great credit for the skilful and orderly handling of a subject which must be immensely difficult.

As usual, the icing on any programme of films from Canada is the latest batch from Norman McLaren and his team of fantasy merchants. His Fiddlededeeds and Hoppityhops and other flibbertigibets have a brilliance and a zest all their own. McLaren has developed himself into something unique, and all honour is due to Canada for providing him with a niche where he can mix colour and boogywoogy to his heart's content. It is tragic that Britain, which originated so much of Lye and McLaren form of abstract work, cannot now find even a tiny crazy corner for experimentalists to play around in.

The thing which is as impressive as anything else in these new Canadian films is the great advance made in all the technical skills of

filmcraft. It is not so long ago that we in Britain thought that we were the top in this type of film. The documentaries that came here from Canada, or from most other countries for that matter, were to us imitations of a type of movie exclusively our own. Their handling was heavy and laboured, their technique poor. But now some of us feel, with a new and not altogether unpleasant sense of humility, that this one-sided state of affairs has gone for good. Take a look at the camera movement in the Bell singers film and McLean's photography in *Who Will Teach Your Child?* Listen to Rathburn's charming, simple and wholly expressive score to the same film, and the excellent recording of the girls' voices in the Bell choir—and it is none too easy to keep purity in the female voice when it goes up high—and you may see what we mean. The Canadians have lost their terrible Transatlantic habit of making their commentators scream at the audience until it is bludgeoned into mute submission, and they write these same commentaries with a skill which we rarely reach. Maybe some of the films are a wee bit too long; maybe some of the post-synching in *Home Town Paper* does look a little odd at times; but these chaps definitely have something, and if we don't pull our socks up a mighty long way we are going to have members of the Board coming over here to teach us our job. Come to think of it, the idea's not such a bad one at that.

* A *

Happy New Year

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Research & Films

IT HAS lately become apparent that a special Film Research Service is required to meet the needs of the variety of bodies—film units, academic institutions, charitable and educational trusts, business organizations and Government departments—connected with the documentary film, and interested in extending its work and influence.

The Research Division at Film Centre has been established to meet this need and is now available to carry out sponsored research into all matters connected with films and visual aids. The facilities offered cover a wide field from the investigation of subject-matter and the preparation of topic analyses to audience and distribution surveys at

home and overseas, sociological investigations and historical research.

Discussions are also beginning about the possibilities of making a comprehensive inquiry into the value of the film as an instrument of scientific research, particularly emphasizing the way in which it might assist the social scientist, giving to him what he lacks at the moment—a form of microscope and instrument of measurement.

By centralizing background research for films, it will be possible to speed up the preparatory work necessary before a film can go into production, thus helping to make production as a whole more economical and more efficient. By studying existing films

and maintaining proper catalogue records the Division will also be able to assist producers to avoid overlap and supply them with source material.

In addition to outside commitments, the Division intends to undertake original research of its own, and to make what contribution it can in published form towards extending and deepening knowledge of the documentary film in the many fields with which it is associated. Hence it becomes an additional link between documentary films on the one hand and a whole variety of outside organizations amongst whom the universities will be a new, most important addition.

FILMS PRODUCED IN SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 1948

TITLE	UNIT	No. of REELS	PRODUCER	DIRECTOR	REG. FOR QUOTA	DIS
A.A. Action	Merlin	3 reels	Hankinson, M.	Gunn, G.		
Adversis Major	Blackheath	1 reel		Cathles, R.	No	
Airfield into Farmfield	COI	1 reel	Re-edited from 'This is Britain' series			
Asdic Series, Two Films	Basic	2 reels	Baxter, R.	Rhodes, J.	No	(Admiralty)
Bernard Miles on Gundogs	International Realist	2 reels	Wright, B.	Wright, B.	Yes	
British Steel	Data	1 reel	Alexander, D.	Thompson, T.	Yes	
Crossroad Drill	Blackheath	1 reel		Cathles, R.	No	
England's Wealth from Wool	Basic	3 reels	Baxter, R.	Napier-Bell, J.		
Every Drop to Drink	World Wide	2 reels	Bond, R.	Francis, M.		
Farm in Spring	COI	1 reel	Re-edited from 'This is Britain' series			
Farmer and the Gontherd	Greenpark		Re-edited from 'Cyprus is an Island'		No	
Fishermans Yarn, A	World Wide	2 reels	Rotha, P.	Holmes, J.		
Good Health	World Wide	2 reels	Carr, J.	Dyment, C.		
Heating Research for Houses	Crown	3 reels	Taylor, J.	Warren, E.		
Katsina	Crown	1 reel				
Kelvin Hughes Marine Radar	Basic	2 reels	Baxter, R.	Napier-Bell, J.		
King's Colours by the King to the RAF	Pathe	1 reel	Baylis, P.		Th.	
Major Power on the Land	Pathe	3 reels	Baylis, P.		Lim.	N-th
Mining Review No. 2	Data	1 reel	Alexander, D.		Yes	
Mining Review No. 3 (Second Year)	Data	1 reel	Alexander, D.		Yes	
Peaceful Years, The	Pathe	6 reels	Baylis, P.		Yes	Th.
Probation Officer	Data	4 reels	Alexander, D.	Holmes, J.	No	
Plan to Work on, A	Basic	3 reels	Baxter, R.	Mander, K.	No	
Radar AA No. 1 Mark 6	Basic	2 reels	Baxter, R.	Sherman, J.	No	(Army)
RAF Festival Reunion	Pathe	1½ reels	Baylis, P.			N-th
Rhonda and Wye	Crown	2 reels	Taylor, J.	Welsh, D.		
Scottish Universities	Data	2 reels	Alexander, D.	Gysin, F.	Yes	
Spinning (Silent)	Basic	1½ reels	Baxter, R.	Napier-Bell, J.	No	
Summer-Drought Island	Greenpark		Re-edited from 'Cyprus is an Island'		No	
Summing Up No. 9	Pathe	1½ reels	Baylis, P.			Th.
This is Britain No. 29	Merlin	1 reel	Hankinson, M.			
" " " No. 30	Merlin	1 reel	Hankinson, M.			
" " " No. 31	Merlin	1 reel	Hankinson, M.			
Trained to Serve	Crown	2 reels	Taylor, J.	Wallace, G.		
Tree of Wealth	Crown	1 reel	Re-edited from film of same title made by Information Films India			
Tube Wells	Crown	1 reel	Re-edited from film of same title made by Information Films India			
Weather and Sunspots	COI	1 reel	Re-edited from 'This is Britain' series			
Weaving (Silent)	Basic	1½ reels	Baxter, R.	Napier-Bell, J.	No	
Work and Speed	COI	1 reel	Re-edited from 'This is Britain' series			

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What we don't do . . .

Every now and then our Secretary pleads that our advertisement should bleakly state: *Realist Film Unit does not sell or loan films.* That and nothing else—to save the time and postage of enquirers and ourselves.

This is usually sidetracked into reflections about the garbled versions of our name on some of the envelopes—such as 'Realism Ltd', 'Real Films', 'the Reality Film Unit' . . .

However, as it's the New Year, we give in and publish the plea: wondering, nevertheless, what an enquirer can do to discover the whereabouts of films we've made, except to write to *Realistic-I-think-it-was*, and ask.

REALIST FILM UNIT LIMITED
 9 GREAT CHAPEL STREET, W.1 • Gerrard 1958

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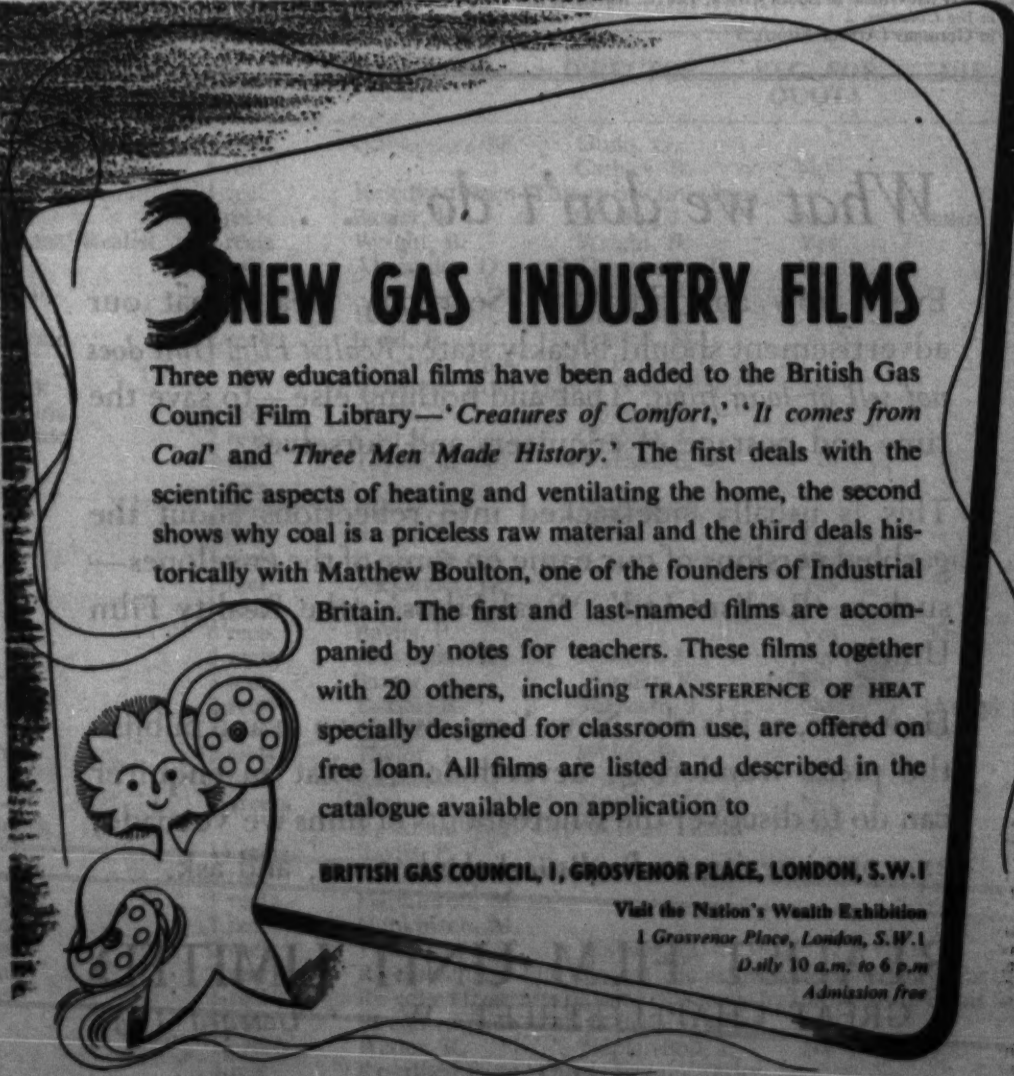
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3 NEW GAS INDUSTRY FILMS

Three new educational films have been added to the British Gas Council Film Library—'Creatures of Comfort,' 'It comes from Coal' and 'Three Men Made History.' The first deals with the scientific aspects of heating and ventilating the home, the second shows why coal is a priceless raw material and the third deals historically with Matthew Boulton, one of the founders of Industrial Britain. The first and last-named films are accompanied by notes for teachers. These films together with 20 others, including TRANSFERENCE OF HEAT specially designed for classroom use, are offered on free loan. All films are listed and described in the catalogue available on application to

BRITISH GAS COUNCIL, 1, GROSVENOR PLACE, LONDON, S.W.1

Visit the Nation's Wealth Exhibition
 1 Grosvenor Place, London, S.W.1
 Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
 Admission free

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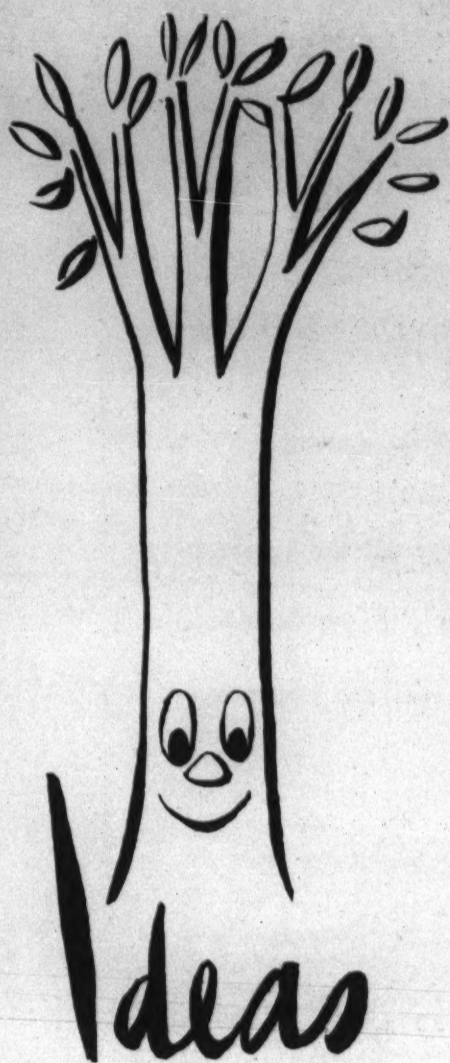
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The Scottish critics, who should know, praise 'Waverley Steps' as a human and authentic film.

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There are many more to come.

SUNDAY EXPRESS
19 SEPT. 48

From the festival

SO much interest was caused in Edinburgh by the best of the new documentary films shown during the festival that a special showing of them had to be arranged in London last week. I have already written about Robert Flaherty's 'Louisiana Story,' but I have only now seen 'Waverley Steps,' which has far more than mere Scottish interest.

It is a fascinating film, and I recommend it as an example of the interpretive (lyrical) screen style as opposed to the purely reportorial, and as an indication of the possibilities inherent and unexploited in a Scottish setting. Paul Fletcher the producer, John Eldridge the director, and John Summerfield the writer must share credit, though I have no means of knowing who contributed exactly what.

A programme note, in which I think I detect the hand of John Grierson, sums up the approach perfectly by saying the film 'makes no concessions to the notion that Edinburgh is the Athens of the north, the capital of the Stuarts, and the home town of David Hume and the age of enlightenment. This is the Nordic Metropolis itself, with a ghost in every stone.'

THE film is built around a bunch of incidents. A railway fireman arrives on a night train and has a day off in his tenement home. A Scandinavian sailor wanders around the sights, and spends the evening in a local pub. A coalman goes about his business enlivened by a midday bet with a street bookie. A miserable bigamist is tried and goes to jail. A little romance starts between two medical students.

An Englishman who had never been to Edinburgh found the picture told him a lot of interesting human things which no 'Come to Edinburgh' sort of film could ever have done. The Scottish Office deserves credit for having sponsored so unobvious and imaginative a treatment of a theme which might have been ironed into mediocrity by conventional handling.

The documentary is at last being appreciated in a land which has produced great documentary makers like John Grierson and Harry Watt.

It was Dr. John Grierson who once described the documentary as "the creative interpretation of reality." One film about Scotland which I saw premiered at this year's Festival lives up nobly to that description.

'Waverley Steps' is its title. An English unit made it, a near-brilliant impression of life in present-day Edinburgh. Few documentaries can surely have caught the atmosphere of a city in more human or authentic fashion.

Here are real people living as we know them. I hope we have many more documentaries like 'Waverley Steps.' Scotland is teeming with subjects for such feature films.

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